

From the  
**LOUISIANA**  
State Historic Preservation Office

Office of Cultural Development,  
Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

## A Wealth of Information at Your Fingertips: Doing Research on Historic Preservation in New Orleans Libraries and Archives

By Stephen Fowlkes  
Division of Historic Preservation

**MOST RESIDENTS** of New Orleans have an appreciation for the many historical treasures that surround us — the buildings and monuments, quaint neighborhoods and large historic districts. Most preservation-minded people know that it is no accident that the unique historic character of any given community or its buildings has been kept intact. Instead, the successful protection of a historic building, or of an entire neighborhood or district, is usually the result of years of extensive research and hard work by the owners, citizens and others who work to protect them.

Research in historic preservation can cover a wide range of topics, such as tracking down who built or lived in a particular house, discovering the cultural significance of a historic neighborhood, or determining the best techniques for repairing historic masonry. There are many different sources and methods for searching for this information. These include research on the Internet, in libraries and archives, and in public records offices.

Most people's first efforts these days are done at home on their computer. Google and other large search engines instantly deliver huge amounts of varied information — from companies selling products to government or nonprofit organizations' reports and publications. One drawback is that the researcher is often faced with



St. Roch Avenue looking from Chartres Street towards St. Claude Avenue circa 1940s. (Courtesy of the Photograph Collection, Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library)

sorting through thousands of hits after doing a search.

Another effective way to benefit from Internet research is to start with a list of Web sites selected by organizations, libraries or agencies with interests similar to yours. For example, the PRC's Web site includes a good list of links at <http://prcno.org/resources/links.php>; and the State's Historic Building Recovery Grant Program Web site also lists suggested links to useful Internet sites for historic preservation research at <http://www.crt.state.la.us/hp/hbrgpuselnks.aspx>.

While Internet searching can turn up some articles and books, the best way to identify published information and primary source material is by searching library collections. New Orleans has a number of libraries and archives that contain excellent collections relevant to historic preservation research. Refer to the list of local libraries and archives that accompanies this article for a description of their collections.

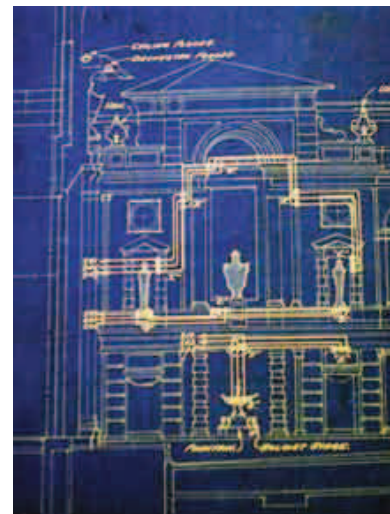
Searching a library's online catalog for books is often the first step in any research project, and this can be done before visiting the library. For extensive research, additional library collections can be searched via the Internet to identify books and other resources available for further reading. An excellent list of architectural libraries can be found on the

Tulane University Library's site at <http://libguides.tulane.edu/content.php?pid=19665&sid=137277>. Books located in remote libraries can usually be obtained through the Interlibrary Loan process. This is a service whereby a researcher can ask their own library to get books or articles for them from other libraries.

Magazine, newspaper and journal articles provide useful research information of all types. Because most of these publications are not freely available on the Internet, the best way to access them is by searching bibliographic databases that index their contents. All libraries and some special archives subscribe to numerous bibliographic and full-text databases for identifying periodical articles.

The accompanying list of online databases has suggestions on where to search for the best articles for historic preservation research. In-depth research often requires the use of more specialized databases that will identify articles in scholarly and professional journals. The Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals and the Design and Applied Arts Index list excellent articles on historic architecture and related topics. America: History & Life is a good source for high-quality articles on regional or local history. SocIndex with Full Text indexes the contents of sociology and urban studies publications, which have great relevance for historic preservation research. And there are several databases listed that focus on more specialized literature and information on historic restoration and conservation of materials as well. After searching any of these databases, don't forget that articles not available locally can also be requested through your library's Interlibrary Loan service.

Libraries' special collections contain invaluable primary research materials such as original drawings, blueprints, photographs, maps and other images useful for studying



Detail from Saenger Theatre plans. (Courtesy of the Emile Weil Collection, Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections Division, Tulane University Libraries)

buildings or neighborhoods. In the same way, original manuscripts, meeting records, news accounts, diaries and public records provide valuable information for historic preservation research. Unlikely sources found in special collections and archives (like postcards, scrapbooks or clippings files) can also reveal valuable information about buildings, neighborhoods, cultural groups and events.

These types of valuable sources, and many more, are available in local libraries and archives and together can reveal much detail about the original historic character of New Orleans' buildings, neighborhoods and other unique cultural assets. Uncovering the hidden details and secrets of the past through library and archival research can be as exciting as discovering a walled-over door in an old house whose secrets have been hidden for decades. In the same way, unexpected information can often shed light on a research project and can open doors that lead you in a new and fascinating direction.



"Drawing for Italianate House, 1876". Alexander Hay Collection, Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections Division, Tulane University Libraries.



Old Charity Hospital circa 1920s. (Courtesy of the Photograph Collection, Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library)

## ONLINE DATABASES USEFUL FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION RESEARCH

Use these to locate periodical articles and other publications. "Proprietary" databases are available only in or through a library. "Open Access" databases are available freely on the Internet.

### PROPRIETARY DATABASES

#### Academic Search Complete

(Available through the New Orleans Public Library)

Indexes general magazines and select scholarly publications

#### Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals

(Available in Tulane University Library)

Indexes professional and scholarly architecture journals

#### Design & Applied Arts Index

(Available in Tulane Library)

Indexes scholarly and professional design journals, including furniture, interior design and architecture

#### America, History and Life

(Available in Tulane and UNO libraries)

Indexes scholarly publications on the history and culture of the U.S. and Canada

#### SocIndex with Full Text

(Available through the NOPL, and in several other local libraries)

Indexes scholarly journals in sociology, urban studies, urban planning, and historic preservation

### OPEN-ACCESS DATABASES

#### AATA Online

(Abstracts of International Conservation Literature)

<http://aata.getty.edu/NPS/>

Indexes literature related to the preservation and conservation of material cultural heritage

#### Bibliographic Conservation Information Network (BCIN):

[http://www.bcin.ca/English/home\\_english.html](http://www.bcin.ca/English/home_english.html)

Indexes literature focused on the conservation, preservation and restoration of cultural property

#### ICCROM Library Catalogue

<http://library.iccrom.org/libris/index.html>

From the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, a catalog of literature related to the conservation, preservation and restoration of cultural property

#### ICOMOS Documentation Centre Database

<http://databases.unesco.org/icomos/>

From the International Council on Monuments & Sites, indexes literature related to the preservation and restoration of historic buildings, monuments, landscapes and sites

## Local Libraries and Archives

Before visiting these libraries and archives, confirm their hours of operation and research policies first. It is also recommended that the reference staff be consulted in each library or archive, as they can suggest the most relevant materials and best search techniques for their particular collections.



The "News Index" card file in the Louisiana Division/City Archives at the New Orleans Public Library selectively covers the contents of their extensive collection of historical New Orleans newspapers. This card entry lists an article with a description of the St. Elizabeth's Asylum in the *Commercial Bulletin* from January 1867. (Photo by Stephen Fowlkes)

#### New Orleans Public Library's Louisiana Division and New Orleans City Archives and Special Collections

[www.nutrias.org/spec/specist.htm](http://www.nutrias.org/spec/specist.htm)

The library's general collections include materials on local history, culture and urban conditions. The Louisiana Division's City Archives houses records of New Orleans' municipal government from 1769 to the present, including information on public property and buildings, zoning, historic districts, etc. The Special Collections department houses photographs, newspapers, postcards, manuscripts, and a large number of property research tools, some of which are available on their Web site. Most of the Special Collection resources are not available online, so researchers must visit the library to do comprehensive searching of their extensive collections and resources.

Contact: 504.596.2610

#### Tulane University Libraries

<http://library.tulane.edu>

#### and Southeastern Architectural Archives (SEAA)

<http://specialcollections.tulane.edu/SEAAHome.html>

Tulane has the largest and oldest library collection in New Orleans. The Howard-Tilton (main) and the Architecture libraries have rich collections for researching architecture and other preservation topics. They welcome non-Tulane researchers, and policies on the use of their materials and services are available at [http://library.tulane.edu/about/library\\_policies/public\\_access.php](http://library.tulane.edu/about/library_policies/public_access.php).

The SEAA, located in Jones Hall, houses collections that focus on the built environment of Louisiana and the Gulf South region. The bulk of their collections are comprised of local architectural office records, including plans, photographs, and more, dating from 1830 to the present. They also have extensive photographic holdings, the library of the New Orleans Town Gardeners (a local garden club), and the oldest extant Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps (dating from 1876). Non-Tulane

researchers may visit the SEAA by appointment. The Louisiana Research Collections, in Jones Hall, also provide materials for in-depth study of the history and culture of the area.

Contact: Howard-Tilton: 504.865.5605;

Architecture Library: 504.865.5391; SEAA:

504.865.5699; Louisiana Collection:

504.865.5685

#### New Orleans Notarial Archives

<http://www.notarialarchives.org/research.htm>

The Research Center and Historical Documents department houses local notaries' records that date from 1733 to 1970. These contain a wealth of information found in historical building and property transaction records. The archive also includes a building contract index from 1767-1970, and thousands of oversize watercolor architectural drawings of 19th-century properties. Researchers may consult their Web site to use online search tools, but must visit the archive in person to do more extensive research.

Contact: 504.568.8577

#### The Historic New Orleans Collection

##### Williams Research Center

[www.hnoc.org/collections/research-center.html](http://www.hnoc.org/collections/research-center.html)

The HNOC operates as a museum and research center focused on the study and preservation of the history and culture of New Orleans and the Gulf South region. The Williams Research Center at 410 Chartres St. contains their large collection of books, documents, photographs and prints. Researchers may search their Web site for an overview of their collections and their online catalog, and may visit the Research Center for more extensive research and assistance in accessing their rich collections.

Contact: 504.523.4662

#### Louisiana State Museum

##### Historical Center

<http://lsm.crt.state.la.us/collections/hcenter.htm>

This collection has materials related to all aspects of local and regional history, including maps, manuscripts, books, microfilm, scrapbooks and pamphlets. Visit their Web site for an overview of the collections and to access the Louisiana Digital Library, a statewide collection of digitized archival materials. The Historical Center is open on Mondays and Tuesdays from 9-4:30, and by appointment Wednesday through Friday. Contact: 800.568.6968

#### Earl K. Long Library

##### University of New Orleans

<http://library.uno.edu/>

The UNO Library's collections support a varied curriculum that includes in-depth study of the history and social conditions of New Orleans and the surrounding area. The Louisiana Collection houses material related to the history of the New Orleans area, including books, manuscripts, photographs and more. The College of Urban and Public Affairs (CUPA) Working Papers are housed in the library, and focus on land-use planning, neighborhood planning, preservation planning and more. Visit their Web site to access the online catalog and the Louisiana Digital Library; databases may be used on-site by visiting researchers.

Contact: 504.280.6549